

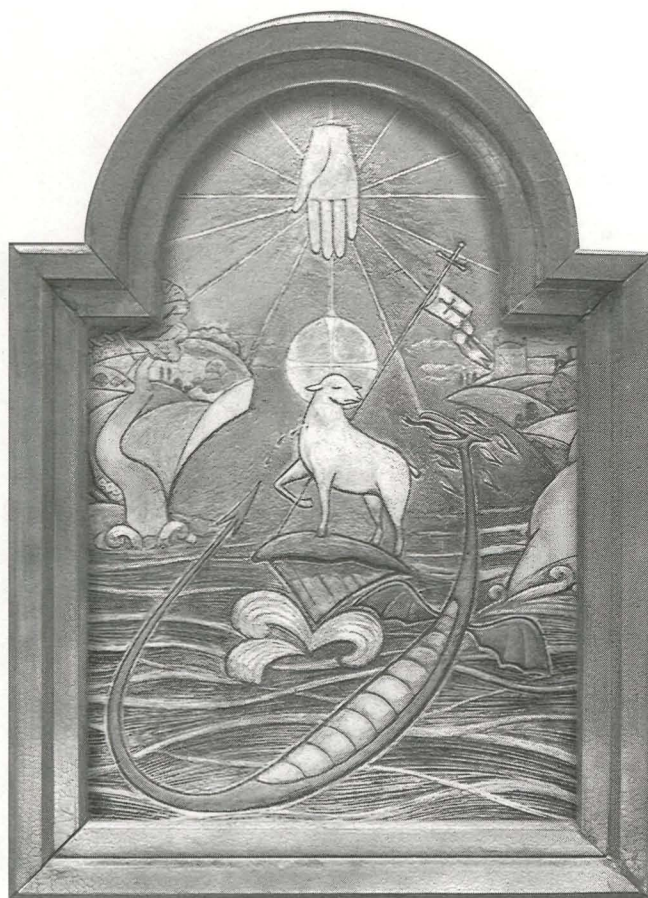
LifeLight

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." John 1:4

Revelation



LEADERS GUIDE



Through dramatic symbolism, Revelation shows the spiritual conflict that surrounds life in this sinful world. At the center stands Christ, the Lamb of God slain for sinners. With the heavenly Father's blessing, Christ triumphs over Satan and opens for you the paradise of heaven, the city of God.



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Developed under the auspices of the LifeLight Committee of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, with funding assistance from the International Lutheran Women's Missionary League.

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Manufactured in the U.S.A.

Cover illustration: Richard Heroldt

Contents

Introducing the LifeLight Program		5
Session 1—Lecture Leader	Understanding the Book of Revelation Revelation 1:1–8	9
Session 2—Lecture Leader	The Triumphant Christ Speaks to His Church Revelation 1:9–3:22	15
Session 3—Lecture Leader	Our Victorious Lord Leads through Trouble to Triumph Revelation 4–7	21
Session 4—Lecture Leader	The World Shaken, God’s Kingdom Stands Firm Revelation 8–11	26
Session 5—Lecture Leader	Christ’s Victory over Satan and His Hosts Revelation 12–14	31
Session 6—Lecture Leader	Praise for God and Armageddon for the World Revelation 15–16	35
Session 7—Lecture Leader	The Agony of the Wicked and the Ecstasy of the Saved Revelation 17–19	40
Session 8—Lecture Leader	The Millennium and the Doom of Satan Revelation 20	45
Session 9—Lecture Leader	Our Victorious Lord Reigns Forever Revelation 21–22	50
<hr/>		
Session 1—Small-Group Leader	Understanding the Book of Revelation Revelation 1:1–8	56
Session 2— Small-Group Leader	The Triumphant Christ Speaks to His Church Revelation 1:9–3:22	58
Session 3— Small-Group Leader	Our Victorious Lord Leads through Trouble to Triumph Revelation 4–7	61
Session 4— Small-Group Leader	The World Shaken, God’s Kingdom Stands Firm Revelation 8–11	64
Session 5— Small-Group Leader	Christ’s Victory over Satan and His Hosts Revelation 12–14	67
Session 6— Small-Group Leader	Praise for God and Armageddon for the World Revelation 15–16	70
Session 7—Small-Group Leader	The Agony of the Wicked and the Ecstasy of the Saved Revelation 17–19	72
Session 8—Small-Group Leader	The Millennium and the Doom of Satan Revelation 20	75
Session 9—Small-Group Leader	Our Victorious Lord Reigns Forever Revelation 21–22	78

Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director *(optional)*

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 56.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 56);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;

- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling

together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). They will follow the same schedule, but they may use the cassette tape to listen to the week's lecture presentation. The discussion leader will obtain the tape and leaflets from the director. A cassette tape version of the lecture is available for purchase from CPH (see your catalog). Or a congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for Revelation

Brighton, Louis A. *Revelation* (Concordia Commentary Series). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999. The author sees Ascension Christology as the heart of the prophetic message, and he relates the imagery to the church's life and worship. A thorough exposition by a well-known professor, scholar, and expert on the book.

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary of the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and time lines.

Franzmann, Martin H. *The Revelation to John*. A Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968. Scholarly yet popularly written exposition.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version: Concordia Edition. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House for Crossway Bibles, 2001, 2003. An accurate and precise word-for-word translation where each word and phrase is carefully weighed against the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek to ensure the fullest accuracy and clarity.

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963. A resource concerned with faithfully expounding the true message of Revelation.

Mueller, Wayne D. *Revelation*, 2nd ed. (People's Bible Commentary Series). Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002. Weaves the New International Version (NIV) of the texts with an in-depth commentary to enrich understanding.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. An invaluable one-volume commentary on the Bible.

Every Voice a Song: Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

Understanding the Book of Revelation

Revelation 1:1–8

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

To more fully understand this last book of the New Testament and to derive the full comfort and inspiration it can give to dedicated Bible students, it is necessary to recognize the centrality of Jesus Christ as the risen Savior and victorious Lord in the midst of all the problems and persecutions of the early Christians. To gain this understanding, Bible students must be alert to such features of Revelation as apocalyptic writing, frequent Old Testament allusions, and the church-historical approach in interpretation.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit, will

1. gain appreciation of the nature and purpose of apocalyptic writing and its fitting use, considering the historical situation prevailing in the early Christian church;
2. develop a richer understanding and deeper trust in Jesus Christ as the victorious Lord through the varied inspired apocalyptic symbols and pictures; and
3. acquire greater courage and skill to express personal Christian hope more effectively to those enduring trials and tribulations today.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 56.

For the Director

Through Bible teaching, study, and discussion, the Holy Spirit works to nurture Christian faith and life—even under the most adverse circumstances. What a thrill and a joy to be used by Him as a LifeLight leader! As director, you have great responsibility in the physical setup for the class sessions. Develop a checklist to pro-

vide, as far as possible, the ideal setting for every participant, but especially for the presenter.

Here are some questions for the checklist: Are all the places cleared that will be necessary for all the classes? Are these places clean and comfortable and inviting? Are they ventilated properly? Is necessary equipment (chairs, tables, chalkboard, chalk, podium or lectern, overhead projector and screen) available? Is the room labeled precisely for each class? Are sheets of paper and pens and pencils provided for those desiring to take notes?

For students properly to fit themselves in the geographic setting of the Book of Revelation, it will be practically necessary for you to supply a map of the Mediterranean world. In the very first session, students should learn the location of Jerusalem, Rome, Patmos, and the seven cities of Asia Minor emphasized in the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation.

For the Lecture Leader

We can well imagine that many lay leaders, men and women, will shy away from being presenters in a study of the Book of Revelation. Even pastors and professional teachers may be reluctant to serve in this capacity because of the strangeness of apocalyptic writing.

You have consented to be a presenter, and we pray God's blessing upon your effort. It can be a wonderful Christian experience. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Spend much time in prayer, both before and after each presentation. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your understanding and to guide your study that you may truly receive what He offers you through His Word.
2. Then approach your study of the Word with eager expectancy. Always remember Paul's inspired word to Timothy: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Remember, the Word has inherent power not only to do great things *through* you but also *for* you.
3. Preferably read the entire section of the presentation for a given week through completely at the beginning of your preparation. Then review it in your mind to see if you have grasped the thrust of it. How does it fit to

the previous material? Are there any new terms or concepts to define? Do you see how the objectives will be met? Can you freely present the biblical material in your own words? Do you see Jesus in it as the victorious Lord and Savior?

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the first LifeLight assembly with a hearty welcome to the participants. Immediately develop an atmosphere of promptness. Start the first session at the established time. Be cheerful and cordial in your demeanor and expression. Normally, the devotional period should be limited to five minutes.

Introduce the worship by telling the participants that this series of Bible studies will emphasize that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), but these hardships will all be truly worthwhile because we are assured that in due time we will receive eternal joy and glory in heaven through the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It’s especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Join together in the prayer printed in the study leaflet.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

The Book of Revelation holds great fascination for Christians and has done so ever since it was written. As we see the uncertainty that exists in the world around us, it is natural to wonder what the future holds. Since the opening verse of the book declares that God gave this revelation to John “to show to His servants the things that must soon take place” (Revelation 1:1), many people throughout the history of the church have carefully scrutinized the book in an effort to find specific predictions of today’s events in the events announced

in the visions. That is still going on today. Inevitably, they are disappointed, for they fail to see that the real purpose of the book is to give comfort to Christians at all times. When God’s people fear that the world is raging out of control, they see here that God is always in control of history.

1 Apocalyptic Literature

As we begin a look at Revelation, we need to be prepared for a Bible study that will be quite different from any other New Testament study we might undertake. The book is written in a style that is quite different from the other books of the New Testament, a style known as *apocalyptic*.

Apocalyptic writings seem strange to us, because they are in a literary form that is quite different from anything we have today. However, the form was not unknown at the time this book was written. During the years surrounding the coming of Christ, while the Jewish nation was struggling under foreign domination, apocalyptic writing came into being. Quite often, these works were ascribed to major biblical characters who supposedly predicted the future and described the destiny of the world and of humanity.

In spite of the fact that most of this literature was not written by the men to whom they are ascribed (scholars call these works *Pseudepigrapha*, meaning “false writings”), God Himself from time to time inspired His prophets to write using this type of literature. Apocalyptic writing occurs in the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah in the Old Testament.

Since apocalyptic writings had been used to bring great comfort during times of trouble and persecution. Jewish readers particularly would have recognized the Book of Revelation for what it is—a book of encouragement in time of trouble, when the temptation to fall away from the faith or to compromise the faith would have been very great.

There are some characteristics of apocalyptic literature that make it unique. First of all, apocalyptic writing takes the form of visions, and these visions transcend the events of history. While the events of the present for the reader at times seem overwhelming, the visions experienced by the one who records the material go above and beyond the present and take into account all of history and show that God is in control of history. In fact, in Revelation God describes Himself as “the Alpha and the Omega” (Revelation 1:8), using the first and last

letters of the Greek alphabet to show that everything from beginning to end is under His control.

It might be said that apocalyptic literature is written in “code.” The imagery in the visions and the use of symbolic numbers serve both to uncover (the term *apocalypse*, the Greek title of the Book of Revelation, means “uncovering”) and to cover. It uncovers the truth to those who have access to the “code book” needed to decode the writing, while it keeps the truth hidden from the outsider. Such writing is quite useful for giving strength, support, and encouragement to the persecuted, while giving nothing away to the persecutor.

In Revelation, and in apocalyptic literature in general, history is seen as a cosmic battleground in which the forces of good and evil contend for final control of the earth and its inhabitants. There is a very strong dualism here—the forces of evil, Satan and his hosts, are mighty indeed, and at times seem to gain the upper hand. However, victory belongs to God and His hosts, as the forces of evil, which have been overcome by Christ on the cross, are ultimately destroyed.

God has a very good purpose in showing this to us. No matter what struggles we face in our lives, even oppression and persecution, there is a great temptation to compromise our faith, or to lay it aside completely. By showing the ultimate destruction of the forces of evil, God sternly warns us of the consequences of falling away, but at the same time He shows us that if we remain faithful we will receive life with Him. “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). That very promise gives us the strength to remain faithful, even when times get tough.

It is extremely important to keep the purpose of the book in mind in order not to be distracted by thoughts that the book does not intend to teach. It would be easy to get caught up in the symbolism of the book and try to find a one-to-one correspondence between events in the visions and events going on today, and then decide that this is the only age in which these prophecies could possibly come to pass. Some have gone so far as to create an elaborate scheme of events that “must” come to pass before Christ returns on the basis of a misunderstanding of the purpose of the book. On the other hand, it may be tempting to simply toss the book away as being too bizarre and of no relevance for our time. There is no question but that the book is difficult for our modern sensibilities to lay hold of.

2 Interpreting Revelation

Scholars have offered four different methods of interpreting the Book of Revelation, each based on different assumptions as to the purpose and message of the book.

The first view, known as the “preterist” view, sees the events of the book happening entirely in the past, specifically at the time of John.

The second view, the “futurist” view, sees the entire book, except for the first three chapters, as lying in the future, the events not taking place until immediately before the return of Christ. One form of this is the “dispensational” view, which divides the history of the world into seven “dispensations,” or ages, with God dealing with humanity in a different way in each. In this view Revelation is understood to cover the last part of the sixth age and the seventh age.

A third view is the “idealist” view, which sees the book speaking symbolically of such timeless truths as the victory of good over evil.

The fourth view, and the view to be preferred (and which is used in this LifeLight study), is the “historical” view, which sees Revelation presenting in a symbolic manner the entire history of the church from the time of Christ up to the last judgment, and into eternity. In this understanding, the seven visions in Revelation each cover the same period of time—the entire age of the church—each vision describing the same events from a different perspective and adding a little more to what was presented in the earlier visions.

This last understanding is to be preferred because it uses proper methods of interpreting the Scriptures, by using the clear passages of the rest of the Scriptures to interpret a book that by its very nature is unclear, rather than reducing the book to either a historical curiosity or a moralistic treatise, as the preterist and idealist views do, or by using Revelation to interpret the rest of Scripture, as the futurist method does.

3 Historical Background

John, the author of this book, was writing to congregations in danger of persecution, while he himself was already suffering persecution. The John who wrote this book was undoubtedly also the John who wrote the Gospel account and the three letters that bear his name.

In the Gospel he is referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 21:20 and elsewhere).

Tradition has it that John is the only one of the Twelve who did not suffer a martyr's death. This, however, did not mean that he did not suffer persecution. In fact, the vision we have recorded in this book (the title is Revelation, in the singular) was given to him while he was in exile on the island of Patmos, a small rocky island off the coast of Asia Minor, where he had been sent for refusing to compromise his faith. The time is about the year A.D. 95, over 60 years after the death and resurrection of our Lord. By this time John was quite old and, tradition tells us, had been living in the city of Ephesus, in the Roman province of Asia.

Through the work of Paul and later the work of John, the province of Asia (present-day Turkey) had become the most thoroughly Christian province in the Roman Empire. However, in spite of the great growth of Christianity in the empire, it can by no means be said that the empire had itself been completely Christianized. Far from it! Christians were still at the mercy of the ruling powers. While the Book of Acts notes occasions in which the ruling powers dismissed charges against St. Paul because they were unjust, the government saw its purpose as the preservation of peace, and religion was one means by which peace and order could be maintained.

By the time Revelation was written, Caesar worship was the most widespread and most widely practiced religion of the Roman Empire. This religion actually was not one that had been imposed upon the nation by the rulers but began as a popular movement, expressing the gratitude of the people toward Rome, which had become personified in the goddess Roma, who came to symbolize the state. As the years went on, worship began to shift from Roma to the emperor himself. From time to time emperors were given divine honors after their death, as Caesar Augustus allowed with Julius Caesar.

Other emperors sought to stop the practice, the major exception being Emperor Gaius, better known as Caligula, who ruled from A.D. 37 to 41. He bestowed divine honors upon himself and even went so far as to attempt to set up a statue of himself in the temple in Jerusalem.

Caligula remained the exception until Domitian, who ruled the Roman Empire from A.D. 81 to 96. Domitian bestowed divine honors upon himself and his predecessors and gave himself the title "Lord and God." He went so far as to require that once a year all residents of

the empire appear before a magistrate and burn a pinch of incense to the emperor as god. If they met this one requirement, they would be allowed to worship any other god or goddess of their own choosing.

How tempting it must have been to offer that one small sacrifice to Caesar and then to be let alone to worship according to one's own conscience! But it was impossible for Christians to offer even that one small pinch of incense, since Jesus Christ was and is their only Lord and God.

The members of the churches in Asia to whom Christ was speaking through John were thus faced with the competing claims of Christ and of one who had set himself up as lord and god. Since Jesus had pointed out that no one can serve two masters, Christians had no option but to refuse to offer this sacrifice. The opening letters to the congregations in Asia, and indeed the whole of the Book of Revelation, come out of the call to remain faithful even in the face of death.

4 Certainty for an Uncertain Future (Revelation 1:1-3)

As we get into the opening verses of Revelation, we can immediately begin to see how the book is to be understood. The opening sentence notes that God gave this revelation to John in order to show "what must soon take place." God desires to give certainty in the midst of an uncertain future, but only on His terms. He will not answer all of our questions, but He will show us that in the midst of seeming defeat we can have hope because the victory has already been won.

That is why those who read this book are called "blessed" (1:3). This term will be used to describe God's people six more times in this book, making a total of seven "beatitudes." God's people will be blessed when they take this book to heart, because "the time is near." The time of persecution, of seeming defeat, has arrived for God's people, and the words of this book provide them with the strength to endure by pointing them to the final victory.

The revelation given to John that comprises the content of this book is given through God's "angel." The angels, ministering spirits who serve God and His people, are mentioned throughout the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, and are active from their singing at the creation of the world (Job 38:7) through their return with Christ at the Day of Judgment (Matthew 25:31). The very word *angel* means "messenger," and one of their most important functions in the Scriptures is that of

delivering messages from God that mark momentous events in the deliverance of His people. Examples include the appearance of the “Angel of the LORD” (possibly the pre-incarnate Christ Himself) to the patriarchs and to Moses at the burning bush to call him to lead Israel out of captivity to the Promised Land, to the use of angels in the call of other prophets (for example, Isaiah in Isaiah 6), and the announcement of the coming births of children who would be instrumental in the deliverance both of Old Testament Israel and of the whole world—of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah, of John the Baptist to Zechariah, of Jesus to Mary and to Joseph, culminating in the announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. Whenever angels speak, the message is to be heard as though coming from the mouth of God Himself.

Angels are active in carrying out God’s judgment against the world throughout Revelation, and also are active in the war against the armies of Satan. We see the war between God and Satan waged on two stages—the spiritual stage and the earthly stage. The spiritual battle rages on, and the defeat of Satan marks the real victory. However, members of the human race are not merely pawns in the struggle, but are deeply involved, for the forces of Satan use other human beings in their quest for the destruction of the people of God.

Far from being insignificant, what goes on in the world has great spiritual significance; the eternal salvation of the people of God is at stake. The Revelation to John reminds God’s people that God’s victory is more than a foregone conclusion—it has already been won through the blood of the Lamb, the Lamb who by His death conquered death. Though Satan is powerful, his defeat is assured.

This revelation comes to John in the midst of this spiritual battle, as the forces of Satan, using the government of the Roman Empire, sought to destroy the church of God, through forcing either apostasy or death. Through apocalyptic imagery, Christians are promised that they already have the victory, even though that victory is visible only through the eyes of faith. This message of hope is conveyed in a way that only Christians can understand, since only Christians have the knowledge that unlocks the code of apocalyptic messages.

5 The Old Testament Key (Revelation 1:4–8)

Already in these opening verses, it becomes clear that the “code book” that unlocks the Revelation to John is

nothing other than the Old Testament. Of the 404 verses of Revelation, 278 of them make reference to the Old Testament. To a people familiar with the Old Testament, Revelation was an open book, not a closed one. Rather than showing a division between Old and New Testaments, Revelation shows that they stand together as a continuous stream, the New Testament fulfilling the Old and pointing to the final fulfillment in the return of Christ for judgment.

It is through the Old Testament that the symbolism of the Book of Revelation may be understood. Verse 7, for example, declares that Jesus is “coming with the clouds.” This verse refers directly to Daniel 7:13, in which the one like a Son of Man comes in the clouds and approaches the Ancient of Days. Jesus Himself applied this prophecy to Himself, as recorded in Matthew 24:30 and 26:64 and their parallels in Mark and Luke. The declaration later on in the verse that even those who pierced Him will look upon Him is a direct citation of Zechariah 12:10, and alludes also to Isaiah 53:5 and Psalm 22:16.

As we enter into a study of Revelation, we will see many strange creatures and awesome events, but many of them are referred to in the Old Testament as well. When the reader who is familiar with the Old Testament sees the events described here, he or she remembers that God is consistent and that the whole of history is in His hands.

When you recognize the “coded” nature of the Book of Revelation, you can begin to make sense of the various numbers that occur in it. The failure to properly understand the use of numbers in Revelation is responsible for some of the many misuses of the book that have arisen within the church, many of which lead to fear rather than comfort.

The numbers in Revelation are important for understanding the message of the book. The meanings of the numbers remain consistent throughout, and knowing the proper meaning will enable you to see the message. While there is not total agreement among scholars as to the precise meaning of some of the numbers, the following guidelines will help you in seeing the message behind the numbers.

The first significant and common number to appear in Revelation is the number 7, first appearing in verse 4, referring to the seven churches in Asia and the seven spirits before the throne of God. Seven is the number of completeness, perfection, or holiness. The creation of the world culminated with God’s resting on the seventh

day. The Old Testament speaks of seven high festivals in the Jewish year, four of them falling in the seventh month, and two of them lasting for seven days. The seven churches that are mentioned are real congregations, but they stand for the whole of Christendom, and the seven spirits symbolize the fullness of the power of the Holy Spirit, perhaps referring to the sevenfold description in Isaiah 11:2—He is the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of power, of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord.

Seven in turn is the sum of two other numbers standing for completeness: 3, which is the number of God (the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and 4, the number of the world (the four directions of the compass). The number $3\frac{1}{2}$, half of 7, is always associated with the evil forces that oppress the church, usually those spiritual and religious in nature. This number comes in several variants as well: “a time, and times, and half a time,” in 12:14; 42 months or 1,260 days (three and one-half years) in 11:2–3 and 12:6.

The numbers 12 and 10 are also of great significance. The number 12 refers to Old Testament Israel (the 12 tribes) and New Testament Israel, the church (the 12 apostles). Ten and its cube ($10 \times 10 \times 10$), 1,000, represent completeness. These may be multiplied and combined to get important illustrative combinations: 24 (Old Testament plus New Testament churches); or 144,000 ($12 \times 12 \times 1,000$ represents the whole people of God—past, present, and future).

Conclusion

As we move through the book, we will see how these numbers illustrate God’s truth to us, how they tell us what must soon take place, and how they are given to us to comfort us in the midst of our struggles in life. This introductory section ends with a resounding note of assurance, as God declares to us that He is the Alpha and the Omega. These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, an appropriate reference, as the book was originally written in Greek. As the first and the last, the one who was, who is, and who is to come, He rules over all human history. These words echo throughout the rest of the book, reminding God’s people that He is in control and that the victory has already been won for them. As we move through the book in the coming weeks, may that declaration of hope and of certain victory be uppermost in your minds.

Concluding Activities

As time permits, encourage a number of participants to read their written answers to question 12 regarding the verse they could identify with most closely and to give their reason for doing so. Suggest that someone speak a brief, pertinent prayer.

Then make any necessary announcements and distribute the enrichment magazine. Encourage participants to browse in the magazine and keep it as a helpful reference for coming lessons.

Encourage participants to set a weekly plan for their LifeLight study. A consistent daily schedule works best for most. Some begin or end the day with LifeLight. Others find another time during the day at home or during a break or lunch hour at work. Invite participants to share their practices, especially if your group has some who are new to LifeLight.

The Triumphant Christ Speaks to His Church

Revelation 1:9–3:22

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

It is a source of joy and comfort to know that Christ gives His message of hope to the church through the ages. Since we live in a sinful world, the church continually struggles with problems from the inside and outside. This week we hear Christ, who has triumphed over all the problems that will ever confront us, even death itself, speaking words of judgment and encouragement to His people and calling them to continued faithfulness.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit, will

1. see that Christ's glorious attributes match the specific needs of each congregation;
2. rejoice in Christ's presence in the midst of His people; and
3. examine their life and the life of their congregation in the light of Christ's standards of judgment as expressed in these letters.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 58.

For the Director

The most helpful materials the director can provide for the second week are maps of the Middle East, and especially of the Island of Patmos and of the seven cities of Asia Minor scrutinized in the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation. It can make the study much more meaningful if the participants can see the geographical relationships.

For the Lecture Leader

The presentation this week should let the triumphant majesty of Jesus Christ beam forth in His appearance

and in His careful analysis of the representative churches mentioned. Help the participants see how fitting Christ's attributes in chapter 1 are to the respective churches in chapters 2 and 3.

Session Plan

Worship

The terms used in this week's Bible study lead us to consider with awe and adoration the triumphant Christ, who guides His church through this world of sin and death.

Psalm 45 is a fitting hymn of praise to the Messiah, and the hymn printed in the leaflet appropriately praises Him who rose from the dead to give us life forever with Him.

If time permits, read Psalm 45. Then continue with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Prayer

Blessed Savior and Lord, You are the first and the last and the living one. You were dead, and behold You are alive forevermore. We are weak, sinful human beings, but You have revealed Yourself to us as our triumphant living Savior. We trust You and want to live our lives to Your glory. By Your Holy Spirit lead us to do so more and more, for Your name's sake! Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

John, an apostle of Jesus Christ, was in exile on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea because of his testimony for Jesus. Rather than deny his Lord and submit to the emperor's command to honor him as a god,

rather than cease preaching the Gospel of the Lord whom he knew and loved, John was willing to go into exile. This certainly was not John's first experience of punishment for testifying of Jesus. Many years previously, back in the city of Jerusalem, John was arrested along with the other apostles for preaching of Christ and was brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court. When commanded to stop, they refused, and rejoiced because "they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41). John was experiencing what all followers of Jesus may at some time or another be called to experience—suffering persecution for the sake of the Gospel. That he identifies his situation with that of other believers is clear, as he identifies himself as his readers' "brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance" (Revelation 1:9).

It was on the Lord's Day (Sunday) that Christ Himself appeared to John in quite a startling way, inaugurating a series of visions by which Christ would comfort His church. Here the Lord speaks directly to John and begins to tell him what "must soon take place" (Revelation 1:1). This first set of visions is specifically addressed to seven congregations in Asia Minor. The events described, however, have their parallels in every age, and the words are as relevant today as they were at that time, because the human condition and the world's attitude toward the church have not changed in the intervening 1,900 years.

The words that are spoken to each church are words of both warning and encouragement; that is, both Law and Gospel. In every case there is an exhortation to remain faithful and also the promise that Christ will always be with His people, as He promised His disciples before He left them (Matthew 28:20).

1 The Appearance of the Triumphant Christ (Revelation 1:9–20)

The description of the one "like a son of man" who appears to John is striking. Though this being is never referred to as "Jesus" or as "the Christ," there is no doubt about who it is. The description of Jesus given here is quite different from the picture we get in the Gospels. While Jesus is never described physically in the Gospels, apart from His transfiguration in which His divine nature shone forth briefly, here great emphasis is placed on His appearance. But it is clear that this is not a physical description, but rather a spiritual portrayal using physical imagery.

While the description at first seems strange and fantastic, its meaning becomes clear when compared to the Old Testament pictures of God and His Messiah. Thus we see that the God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ is the God of all ages. He is the one "like a son of man" who is referred to in Daniel 7:13, the one who comes with the clouds of heaven. He wears a robe down to His feet, the style worn by the high priest of the Israelite religion (Exodus 28:4; 29:5). The golden sash He wears indicates that He occupies the office of high priest, the office ascribed to Jesus throughout the Letter to the Hebrews.

His hair is white like wool, the symbol of wisdom and purity. In Daniel 7 it is the "Ancient of Days" whose hair is "like pure wool," so we see a clear connection between the Son and the Father. What is ascribed in Scripture to the Father is here also ascribed to the Son. What belongs to the "Ancient of Days" likewise belongs to the Son of Man. His eyes are like blazing fire, indicating penetrating insight—nothing escapes His gaze, and all that human beings seek to keep hidden is laid open to the eyes of Christ. His voice has the "roar of many waters," a description given to the voice of God in Ezekiel 43:2. The sash, the eyes, the feet like bronze and the voice all also call to mind the one "having the appearance of a man" who delivers a message to Daniel in Daniel 10.

1:20—As Jesus Himself states, the seven stars in His right hand represent the messengers ("angels") of the churches, most likely the pastors of the churches, and the seven lampstands among which He stands represent the seven churches to whom the seven letters that follow are being sent; by extension these also represent the whole church on earth. Like a lampstand, the church does not produce the light of the world, but it rather bears the Light of the world, Christ Himself. It bears the Light to the world by speaking the Word of God, which has been committed to it. When the Word of God is spoken by His people, it is as though Christ Himself is speaking.

Since the Old Testament (Isaiah 49:2) tells us that the mouth of the servant of God will be made "like a sharp sword," and since the New Testament says that the Word of God is the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17), or is "sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12), the image of the sword coming out of Christ's mouth is quite appropriate. Our Lord governs the world by no other way than by His Word. The Word of God alone changes the lives of people: it drives us to repentance

when it convicts us of our sin through the preaching of the Law, and it gives us hope and comfort and empowers us for service through the Good News that God has been merciful to us by sending Christ to die for us.

The Christ who appears to John by His very appearance shows Himself to be victorious. His face shines like the sun, as it did at His transfiguration, an event that John himself witnessed. When John, quite understandably, falls at the feet of Christ, he hears the words "Fear not." Whenever God acts, whenever people see God as He really is, they naturally become even more aware of their insignificance when compared to the majesty of God, and their wretchedness when compared to the holiness of God, so that they tremble in fear. But for the people of God those words of assurance, "Fear not," come as a great comfort, assuring them that God has put away their sins, that they stand cleansed before God, and that God has declared them to be His people.

The words of Jesus set the stage for the rest of Revelation, because they point to the victory which has already been won. Verse 17—He describes Himself as the First and the Last, echoing the words of 1:8, which are ascribed to the Lord God, thus showing that He and the Father truly are one, as Jesus had declared in John 10:30. Verse 18—His declaration that He was dead and is now alive forever shows that He is *already* victorious. The events to come (which Revelation will reveal in the following visions) show Satan's last-ditch attempts to destroy the work of Christ, to turn the world away from Him. But in the resurrection of Christ it is made clear to us that the victory has already been won—that we need not fear those who can destroy the body but cannot destroy the soul (that is, who can kill us physically but cannot touch us spiritually), because eternal life has already been won for us. The strength to endure whatever the world sends against us comes from knowing the one who has already won the victory. He is the one who has the keys to death and Hades, who has released His people from their power, and who will ultimately condemn the wicked to eternal destruction.

2 The Letters to the Churches (Revelation 2–3)

It is this victorious Lord who speaks to the seven churches of Asia Minor. These churches were real congregations in existence at that time. If you look at a map of Asia Minor, you can see the cities mentioned, and notice that, if you move from city to city, you move in a horseshoe pattern that touches each of the cities in turn,

from Ephesus at the southwestern tip to Laodicea at the southeastern tip. These cities all lay on a major thoroughfare, making it possible for the letters to them to be widely disseminated. As major centers of Asia Minor, the worship of the emperor would be especially strong in those cities and the threat of persecution especially strong.

There is no doubt that the problems mentioned were literal problems being experienced by those congregations. Nevertheless, since the number 7 itself indicates completeness, the seven churches themselves, though real congregations, are representative of the entire Christian church of all times and places. The churches of God today all have their challenges, and Satan is as active today in his struggle to destroy the church as he was then. Therefore, the letters to these first-century congregations have relevance for the congregations of today, first in their words of warning and exhortation, but also in their words of comfort and encouragement.

The letters to the seven churches are written in the same format, and a sevenfold division can generally be seen, though in special cases one or more parts may be missing: (1) the greeting; (2) a title of the risen Christ based on the description in chapter 1; (3) a word of praise, beginning "I know"; (4) a criticism; (5) a warning; (6) an exhortation, beginning "He who has an ear"; and (7) a promise, which will reach fulfillment in the closing chapters of the book (Revelation 20–22). Some of the churches are doing well, some have problems brewing, and yet others are in grave spiritual danger.

So it is among the churches of God today. These letters all use God's formula for dealing with His people—praising us for our service, calling us to repentance when we fail to be vigilant, warning us of the outcome should we fall away, and exhorting us to remain faithful. All of this is done in the context of His Lordship over His church and always laying before us the hope that He has won for us—the hope that gives us the strength to endure. Each letter ends with a declaration of the blessing that will belong to the one who "conquers." We know that God's people are "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). Faith brings victory because it clings to the one who has already emerged victorious. Those who remain faithful will emerge victorious with their victorious Lord.

A. Ephesus (2:1–7)

The first letter (Revelation 2:1–7) is written to the church at Ephesus. Ephesus was the greatest city in Asia

Minor at that time, and it was the center for worship of the goddess Artemis (Diana). The temple to Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The church was begun through the preaching of Paul (Acts 19), and the riot that ensued as a result of Paul's preaching of the Gospel shows how the world reacts violently against Christ when it believes that its own interests are being threatened. Nevertheless, Paul had a successful ministry there, and the congregation was well established through his preaching of the Gospel.

Verses 2–3—Christ here praises the congregation for its hard work and its perseverance in the faith—how it refused to tolerate the wicked and tested those who claimed to be apostles, but were not (that is, who were false teachers under the guise of God's servants). In other words, they knew the Word of God and were able to determine who taught according to it and who did not. Like the Bereans to whom Paul preached (Acts 17:11), the Ephesians searched the Scriptures to see if what these men said was so.

Verse 6—They are also praised for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans, a sect that sought to compromise with pagan society, proclaiming that Christian liberty allowed them to practice idolatry and immorality, thus allowing them to avoid suffering for the faith. Such practices must certainly be condemned, for Christ calls us to deny ourselves and our own desires, take up our cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34). The Ephesians were aware of the seriousness of committing their entire beings to Christ, for it might well put them in the way of suffering.

However, while they were commended for their zeal, they were also called upon to repent of forsaking their first love (Revelation 2:4). Their love for Christ and for one another had cooled, and had to be restored, since love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). While He was engaged in His earthly ministry, Christ warned the Pharisees of their unloving, self-righteous attitude, pointing out that the heart must be right for the actions to be approved by God. The Ephesians were doing what was outwardly correct, but their hearts were not right, and they were again in danger of falling under God's judgment. Christ called them to continual self-examination and repentance lest they be lost.

The message is one that we need continually to hear today, lest our love also cool and we begin to take Christ's blessings for granted. Remember who and what we are, and what Christ has done for each of us! Then our zeal for the Lord will increase, as will our love for

Him and for all for whom He died. Do so, and we, too, will eat of the tree of life, taken away with the fall (Genesis 3:22–24), but to be restored in the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 22:2, 14).

B. Smyrna (2:8–11)

To the church at Smyrna, a powerful and beautiful city in which Greek and Roman culture flourished, Christ has nothing but praise and encouragement. Already being persecuted by some of the Jewish population of the city, they are warned to be prepared for a brief period ("ten days," a short, limited period [v. 10]) of further persecution. Nevertheless, they are told not to be afraid, because by being faithful they will inherit a crown of life. Though they may even have to experience physical death, they are assured that the second death, eternal death, will not touch them.

Though for the most part we today do not experience physical persecution, we nevertheless live in a culture that looks down on and ridicules Christ, His people, and their lifestyle. Therefore, the encouragement not to give in to the surrounding culture is an important message to us. We may be assured that Christ will continue to give us the strength to remain faithful and that such faithfulness will be rewarded with the gift of eternal life.

C. Pergamum (2:12–17)

The city of Pergamum, the northernmost of the seven cities, was the administrative center of the province, and so emperor worship was strictly enforced there. Verse 13—It thus was the city "where Satan's throne is." Jesus was pleased that the church was remaining faithful even though Christians were being put to death there. Verses 14–15—However, they are also warned against tolerating those who "hold to the teaching of Balaam" and of the idolatrous and immoral Nicolaitans. When Balaam was unable to curse Old Testament Israel, he counseled Balak to entice Israel into immorality, thus bringing a curse upon themselves. Thus both groups would tempt the church to compromise with the surrounding culture and would thus bring about the downfall of many in the church.

The world is uncomfortable with those who by their lives show that the behavior of the rest of the world is shameful. Christ warns us about tolerating shameful people, and He calls to repentance those who do such things and those who tolerate them. It is tempting to "flirt" with sin, or to think that, since forgiveness is always available, resisting is not all that important. Verse

17—Not so! As God is holy, so He calls His people also to be holy. To those who continue the fight, Christ promises His heavenly food, that is, eternal life. They will also receive “a white stone, with a new name,” which serves as their admission ticket to the heavenly banquet. The “new name” signifies the beginning of new life for those who turn from their old way of life to Christ. Embracing Christ means new life, life that ceases to be enamored with sin and instead despises and repudiates it. (Romans 6:2) “How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

D. Thyatira (2:18–29)

The city of Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities. It is mentioned in Acts (16:14) as the home of Lydia, Paul’s first convert in Philippi. Verse 19—The Christians at Thyatira are praised for growing in love, faith, service, and perseverance, unlike those at Ephesus, who had lost their first love. Verse 20—Nevertheless, they were guilty of tolerating “Jezebel.” The name is a code name from the Old Testament given to a false prophetess active in the city. Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, King of Israel, who had actively sought to destroy the worship of the true God among the Israelites and replace it with the worship of Baal. Perhaps the attitude of love being conveyed by the people became misguided and led to tolerance of an evil that should have been cast out from among God’s people.

As citizens of a pluralistic society that continually demands tolerance of views and practices that Christians should find intolerable, we find that these words speak to us today as well. The exalted Christ warns these Christians that they were being enticed into both idolatry and adultery. Here the Old Testament theme of idolatry being a spiritual form of adultery, as seen in the writings of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, is proclaimed. Unfaithfulness, both sexual and spiritual, shows contempt rather than love for the one offended and destroys relationships rather than healing them. Verse 22—“Jezebel’s” coming destruction is announced, and those who tolerated her behavior are called upon to repent. Genuine love will not tolerate evil, but will condemn it. Those who participate in it must be warned, lest they set themselves up for destruction.

E. Sardis (3:1–6)

The problem in Sardis was spiritual lethargy. Christ declared that, though they had a reputation for being alive, they were in fact dead. He urged them to wake up.

It may be that since there were no major problems in the church at Sardis there was nothing to challenge them—nothing to keep them sharp—and as a result they had sunk into a stupor. They looked fine outwardly, but in fact were only going through the motions of the faith.

We Christians dare never think that we “have it made” at any time, because Satan is always ready to catch us unawares. Verses 2–3—Jesus warned those in Sardis that if they did not wake up, the Day of Judgment would come upon them “like a thief,” as He had warned His disciples while still on earth (Matthew 24:42–44). Verse 4—He does note that there were still some in Sardis who were “worthy,” that is, who still had faith and so were truly active in service for their Lord. Verse 5—To those, Christ gives the promise that they will be “clothed thus in white garments”; dressed in His righteousness.

We who remain in the faith are promised the same and are told that our names will not be blotted from the Book of Life—that is, we will not lose our citizenship in the Kingdom of God. The one who holds the “seven spirits” and the “seven stars” will not let His people fall from His hand. Here Christ repeats the promise He made while on earth, that those who acknowledge Him would be acknowledged by Him before His Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32).

F. Philadelphia (3:7–13)

As with the church at Smyrna, Jesus had nothing but praise for the church in Philadelphia. Though the people of the church were perceived as weak, that is, as having little strength, they had nevertheless remained faithful. The Christians of Philadelphia were being attacked by the “synagogue of Satan,” those Jews who refused to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah. But the Christians of Philadelphia were assured that at the Judgment these Jews will be forced to acknowledge that Christ had loved the Christians of Philadelphia. They were encouraged to remain faithful in the future as they had been in the past and were promised that they would be preserved from the hour of trial; that is, they would be kept safe when God pours His wrath upon the world. They, like the church at Pergamum, were promised that they would be inscribed with the new name given from Christ Himself. Their strength in their weakness was the grace of God, given them in His Word. God’s strength is indeed made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

G. Laodicea (3:14–22)

The church at Laodicea was the church in the worst condition of all. They were “lukewarm”; they had no zeal for the Lord at all. Even hostility toward Christ is better than this! At least those who are hostile are showing some passion about their beliefs; passion of any kind was lacking among the Christians of Laodicea. Rather than being concerned about their spiritual welfare and that of others, they instead gloried in their earthly wealth. Though outwardly rich, they were spiritually wretched. Yet, though Christ warned them that if they did not change He would spit them out of His mouth (3:16), He had not yet abandoned them. Christ instead called upon them—indeed pleaded with them—to repent so that they would be restored and would sit with Him on His throne, live and rule with Him.

Verse 20—Such is Christ’s incredible love, that He continually seeks out those in danger of losing their lives, to restore them to Himself. What a beautiful, heart-moving plea Christ makes as He stands at the door and knocks, asking for an invitation to come into our hearts!

Conclusion

Though all seven of these cities were prominent at that time, they are no longer significant. Ephesus lies in ruins, and the others for the most part are sparsely populated. The world changes. Cities and nations rise and fall. Through all of these changes, only the Word of God remains. But that Word brings victory to us today as it did to those Christians in their day.

God’s people still need to take those warnings to heart, for the temptations of that time remain temptations today. But the promise of victory that has already been won by Christ still is ours today as well.

Concluding Activities

Speak a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to help us “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:11). After the prayer make any necessary announcements. Encourage participants to refer to the enrichment magazine as part of their study.